



Media Release

Drop-off your drugs safely and help combat the epidemic of opioid abuse

May 16, 2016 – Metro Vancouver residents are encouraged to safely dispose of their medications to ensure they don't get into the wrong hands or pollute the environment.

Given the recent news that BC will likely have a record number of drug overdoses this year, the safe disposal of medication is especially critical. Prescription drugs can be effective in helping people to manage pain and other conditions, but if used inappropriately they can have deadly consequences.

During a kick-off campaign that runs from May 16 to 21, patients can bring unused or expired medications to select Vancouver police stations, community centres and London Drugs pharmacies at no charge. Medication can also be returned to community pharmacies across BC at any time of the year.

"We know that our youth are using prescription drugs recreationally in numbers we have never seen before," says Inspector Martin Bruce with the Vancouver Police Department. "In the majority of cases, they are not getting those drugs from shady dealers in back alleys, but from the medicine cabinet at home or from the house of a friend or relative. The harm that these drugs can cause can be irreparable."

That's why the BC Medications Return Program ensures medications aren't thrown in the garbage, where they could be found by young people or pets, or flushed down the toilet, where they can harm the marine environment.

Medication should be stored out of reach of children or in a locked cabinet. According to the 2010–11 Youth Smoking Survey, 8.2% of Canadian youth in grades 6–12 reported using prescription and over-the-counter drugs in a 12-month period to get high.

"There are 615 community pharmacies in Metro Vancouver that will accept medication returns at any time," says Geraldine Vance, CEO of the BC Pharmacy Association. "Your pharmacist is the best person to help you dispose of unwanted drugs."

To encourage the public to heed this message, the BCPhA and Health Products Stewardship Association have produced a new video on the theme of Fish Can't Say No to Drugs, which can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/Qakaycalh1U>.

In 2015, Metro Vancouver residents returned more than 49,000 kilograms of expired or unused medications to community pharmacies for safe disposal. This is a 10 per cent increase in the number of medications returned in 2014 and over a 90 per cent increase in the number returned in 2009, in the early days of the awareness campaign.



“Metro Vancouver residents are increasingly realizing the benefits of keeping pharmaceuticals out of the garbage and our wastewater system,” said Malcolm Brodie, Chair of Metro Vancouver’s Zero Waste Committee. “We operate innovative solid waste and wastewater systems in our region, and this program helps them to function optimally while safeguarding the environment.”

The Medications Return Program covers all prescription drugs, over-the-counter medications, including topical antibiotic and antifungal creams, and natural health products that are orally ingested such as vitamins, minerals, traditional Chinese medicines, herbal products, probiotics, and homeopathic medicines. More than 95 per cent of community pharmacies in BC participate in the program, which is free for all British Columbians.

“London Drugs has been taking back medication for proper disposal for years,” says John Tse, vice president, pharmacy, London Drugs. “It is imperative individuals think carefully about where their medication is stored and to watch for unused medication being left in open spaces.” Risks to the environment and more information can be found at www.londondrugs.com/Medication-Disposal.html

Any liquid or cream medications should be kept in their original container with any personal information removed or blacked out, and solid medications like pills should be combined into a small bag. For more information, visit www.healthsteward.ca.

The drop-off locations in Vancouver are the VPD service counters at 2120 Cambie Street (May 16-21) and 3585 Gravelly Street (May 16-20) from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., Trout Lake and Kerrisdale Community Centres (May 21 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.) and all London Drugs locations in Vancouver (May 16-21 from 9 a.m. to 10 p.m.).

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The BCPhA is a not-for-profit, voluntary association, representing more 3,000 pharmacists and more than 850 pharmacies throughout British Columbia.

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